

ECOFEMINISM IN THE INTERPRETATION OF ZULFIYA QUROLBOY
QIZI'S STORY "AYOL" ("WOMAN")

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Abstract. *The article analyzes Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's story "Ayol" ("Woman") from the perspective of ecofeminist theory. Drawing on direct textual citations, it examines the image of the terminally ill protagonist, the symbolism of sunlight and nature, and the question of medical-institutional control over the female body.*

Key words: *ecofeminism, female image, sun symbolism, nature motifs, body and control, contemporary Uzbek prose, Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi, gender critique, ecological consciousness, feminist literary criticism.*

ZULFIYA QUROLBOY QIZINING "AYOL" HIKOYASI TALQINIDA
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Annotatsiya. *Maqolada Zulfiya Qurolboy qizining "Ayol" hikoyasi ekofeminizm nazariyasi nuqtai nazaridan tahlil qilinadi. Og'ir xastalikka chalingan bosh qahramon obrazi, quyosh va tabiat tasvirlarining ramziy yuki, shuningdek ayol tanasi ustidan tibbiy-institutsional nazorat masalasi matniy iqtiboslar asosida yoritiladi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *ekofeminizm, ayol obrazi, quyosh ramzi, tabiat motivlari, tana va nazorat, zamonaviy o'zbek nasri, Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi, gender tanqidi, ekologik ong, feministik adabiyotshunoslik.*

ЭКОФЕМИНИЗМ В ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ РАССКАЗА «АЁЛ» ЗУЛЬФИИ
КУРОЛБОЙ КИЗИ

Аннотация. *В статье рассказ «Аёл» Зульфии Куролбой кизи анализируется с точки зрения теории экофеминизма. На основе текстовых цитат рассматриваются*

образ тяжелобольной героини, символика солнечного света и природы, а также вопрос медико-институционального контроля над телом женщины.

Ключевые слова: *экофеминизм, образ женщины, символ солнца, мотивы природы, тело и контроль, современная узбекская проза, Зулфия Куролбой кизи, гендерная критика, экологическое сознание, феминистское литературоведение.*

Introduction

The theory of ecofeminism, which took shape in world literary studies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, is recognized as a method of analysis that reveals, through literary texts, the historical-cultural parallel between woman and nature, and the fact that both have been interpreted as a “controllable, manageable object” by patriarchal-institutional structures. As K. Warren notes, ecofeminism is a theoretical orientation that studies the logical and cultural connection between the oppression of women and the ruthless exploitation of nature [7, p. 21].

In contemporary Uzbek prose, the question of woman's fate, her inner world, and her place in society occupies a special position. From this point of view, the work of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi is increasingly studied in Uzbek literary criticism: researchers particularly emphasize the subtle psychological depiction of female consciousness in her stories, the inner conflicts connected with fate, and the symbolic harmony of nature imagery [1, pp. 162–165].

The relevance of this article lies in the fact that the writer's story “Ayol” – which portrays the final days of a woman in the grip of severe illness in close connection with imagery of the sun and nature – constitutes rich literary material for ecofeminist analysis, yet this work has not previously been examined from a specifically ecofeminist perspective in Uzbek literary studies. For this reason, interpreting the story on the basis of world ecofeminist theory, grounded directly in the text, constitutes a genuine scholarly contribution.

The aim of the study is to systematize the main tenets of ecofeminist theory and to apply them to the analysis of the female protagonist, the sun-nature imagery, and the question of bodily control in Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's story “Ayol.”

The objectives of the study are: 1) to outline the stages of development and the key concepts of ecofeminist theory; 2) to identify the general characteristics of the woman-nature motifs in the work of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi; 3) to demonstrate, through textual examples, the compositional-symbolic function of sun and nature imagery in “Ayol”; 4) to analyze the medical-institutional control over the female body and the protagonist's forms of inner resistance; 5) to outline the prospects of the ecofeminist approach in contemporary Uzbek literary criticism.

Research methodology

The study is based on comparative-typological and literary-analytical methods. The theoretical foundation draws on the fundamental works on ecofeminism by K. Warren, V. Plumwood, G. Gaard, and V. Shiva, as well as on the research of local literary scholars who

study the work of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi [1, 3, 8–9]. The direct literary source for the analysis is the full text of the writer's story “Ayol,” as published in the Ziyouz electronic library [9].

The analysis was carried out in two stages: at the first stage, the key concepts of ecofeminist theory (the woman-nature parallel, the “logic of domination,” control over the body, embodied-affective knowledge) were systematized; at the second stage, these concepts were applied, by means of close reading, to concrete passages, dialogues, and images within the text of the story. Since the story is available only as a single, unpaginated electronic edition, in-text references are given by the serial number of the source in the list of references.

Results and discussion

1. The formation of ecofeminist theory and its key concepts

Although the term “ecofeminism” was first used by the French scholar F. d'Eaubonne in 1974, it began to take shape as a theory only in the second half of the 1980s, most notably with C. Merchant's “The Death of Nature.” In Merchant's view, the natural philosophy of the European Renaissance gradually shifted the image of nature from that of a “living mother” to that of a “controllable mechanism,” a shift that simultaneously laid the ground for interpreting woman as a “natural,” and therefore “subordinate,” being [4, pp. 2–4].

V. Plumwood advances the “logic of domination” as the central concept of ecofeminist theory: within the system of binary oppositions such as culture/nature, mind/body, and man/woman, the first term is always treated as superior and the second as subordinate to it [5, pp. 41–43]. K. Warren, in turn, identifies two tasks of ecofeminist critique: first, to expose the mechanisms by which women and nature are subordinated; second, to identify the forms of resistance – often subtle and everyday – that they mount against this pressure [7, pp. 60–62]. V. Shiva's research, grounded in the experience of India, interprets women's physical-affective connection with nature as a source of their ecological knowledge [6, pp. 14–17].

2. Woman and nature motifs in the work of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi

According to the literary scholar K. Egamberdiyeva, Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi actively uses nature imagery as a symbolic device for depicting the inner states of her female protagonists [1, pp. 163–166]. The researcher O. Normatov, in his article “The Wisdom of the Heart,” describes Zulfiya's prose as written “not with the mind but with the heart,” emphasizing the emotional-intuitive nature of her style [3, p. 2]. The story “Ayol” vividly displays precisely these two features – the symbolic weight of nature imagery and an emotional-intuitive narrative manner – which makes it a particularly rewarding subject for ecofeminist analysis.

3. Sun-nature imagery in “Ayol”: a circular composition

The story opens and closes with imagery of nature – a circular composition that carries particular significance for an ecofeminist reading. At the beginning, the protagonist greets the sunlight with joy, whispering: “Another dawn of life has broken” [9], and addresses it directly: “How much I love you, sun!..” [9]. This address establishes a personal, almost intimate relationship between the woman and the sun (nature) – a relationship that, unlike the cold, clinical human-medical communication surrounding her, occurs without any mediation, directly.

In the night scene, the imagery of nature expands further: the sky, the moon, and the stars are personified, depicted as straining “not to give way” to the approaching dawn – as though, like the protagonist herself, they too were waging a “struggle” against time and death. Such personification gives literary form to the shared experience, described by V. Plumwood, of existing in the interval between transience and permanence that unites woman and nature [5, pp. 44–46].

At the end of the story, a tragic reversal of this same image occurs: sunlight pours into the room just as it did at the beginning, but now it can no longer redden the woman's “stone-still eyelids,” nor be reflected in her pupils – the light “could only be reflected in the diamond facets of the ring that had appeared on the woman's fingers” [9]. Even after the woman's death, the sun, “unwilling to leave this place,” continues to pour out its rays generously [9]. This detail leads to an important ecofeminist conclusion: nature is not indifferent to human tragedy, yet it manifests itself as a continuity greater than, and unbroken by, human death – an inverted, yet harmonious, expression of the regenerative power that V. Shiva attributes to the woman-nature bond [6, pp. 18–20].

4. Control over the female body and inner resistance

One of the central concerns of ecofeminist critique is the observation that the female body and nature are spoken of in the same register, as a “controllable object” [7, pp. 52–54]. This observation finds clear confirmation in “Ayol”: whenever the protagonist's body is discussed, the language turns sharply clinical – dominated by medical-physiological terms such as “swelling,” “fluid,” and “abdominal cavity” – whereas the imagery of nature retains a lyrical, tender register. This contrast between two linguistic registers – the “mechanization” of the woman's body set against the “animation” of nature – is a literary reflection of the very shift in thought described by C. Merchant [4, pp. 2–4].

At the same time, the protagonist does not entirely relinquish control over her own body and death – she performs small but meaningful acts of resistance: she gives money to the nurse and asks that her husband not be let into the room for a time [9]; she asks the doctor to remove the fluid in her abdomen completely, to spare her further suffering, and offers her gold ring in return [9]; and, in her final moments, she “takes powder and lipstick from under her pillow” [9]. This last act is especially significant: even as institutional-medical language treats her body as a “patient,” an “object,” the protagonist insists on remaining the subject who determines how she will be seen until the very end. This corresponds to the second task of ecofeminist critique identified by K. Warren – that of identifying forms of resistance to subordination [7, pp. 60–62].

The protagonist's denial of her own condition – expressed in her question, “Look closely – do I look like someone who is going to die soon?” [9] – is confirmed, tellingly, only through her contact with the outside world, the open air, and the sun. She seeks to prove her health not through institutional-medical judgment but through her physical-emotional connection with nature. This shows that the protagonist accepts nature as her own “criterion of truth,” trusting embodied, affective knowledge more than institutional knowledge – which

corresponds to V. Shiva's account of women's practical-affective knowledge of nature [6, pp. 14–17].

5. Prospects of the ecofeminist approach in contemporary Uzbek literary studies

To date, the work of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi has been studied in Uzbek literary criticism mainly from gender and psychological perspectives [1, 2, 8]. The ecofeminist approach enriches this analysis with an ecological-philosophical dimension, making it possible to examine the female image not only in social terms but also in terms of its relationship to nature and to control over the body. The prospect of this approach lies in its potential to serve as a methodological basis for the comparative analysis of the writer's other works as well.

Conclusion

The analysis conducted in this study shows that ecofeminist theory can serve as an effective methodological foundation for interpreting Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's story “Ayol.” The story's circular composition – opening with an image of the sun and closing with the same image reversed in meaning – reveals a profound symbolic connection between woman and nature. The contrast between the clinical language used to describe the woman's body and the lyrical language used to describe nature constitutes a literary expression of the “logic of domination” central to ecofeminist theory. At the same time, the protagonist's determination to retain control over her own body and appearance until the end – bribing the nurse, pleading with the doctor, applying make-up before her death – reflects an important dimension of ecofeminist critique: the subtle forms that resistance to subordination can take.

The following practical recommendations may be offered: 1) to incorporate methods of ecofeminist analysis into university courses on contemporary Uzbek prose; 2) to continue the comparative study of Zulfiya Qurolboy qizi's work within the context of world ecofeminist theory; 3) to apply the same perspective to other contemporary Uzbek works rich in woman-nature motifs. Future research might extend this methodology to the writer's other stories, such as “Kasal qush” (“The Sick Bird”) and “Oyimtilla.”

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